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THE SERI INDIANS

By W J McGee.

INTRODUCTION

Salient Features

Something has been known of the Seri Indians (Seris, Ceris, Ceres, Heris, Tiburones) since the time of Coronado, yet they remain one of the least-studied tribes of North America. The first systematic investigation of the tribe was made in the course of expeditions by the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1894 and 1895; it was far from complete. 114

The Seri Indians are a distinctive tribe in habits, customs, and language, inhabiting Tiburon island in Gulf of California and a limited adjacent area on the mainland of Sonora (Mexico). They call themselves *Kun-kaak* or *Kmike:* their common appellation is from the Opata, and may be translated "spry". Their habitat is arid and rugged, consisting chiefly of desert sands and naked mountain rocks, with permanent fresh water in only two or three places; it is barred from settled Sonora by a nearly impassable desert. Two centuries ago the population of the tribe was estimated at several thousands, but it has been gradually reduced by almost constant warfare to barely three hundred and fifty, of whom not more than seventy-five are adult males, or warriors. 101 [131] 133 161

The Seri men and women are of splendid physique; they have fine chests, with slender but sinewy limbs, though the hands and especially the feet are large; their heads, while small in relation to stature, approach the average in size; the hair is luxuriant and course, ranging from typical black to tawny in color, and is worn long. They are notably vigorous in movement, erect in carriage, and remarkable for fleetness and endurance. 142 [147]

The Seri subsist chiefly on turtles, fish, mollusks, water-fowl, and other food of the sea; they also take land game, and consume cactus fruits, mesquite beans, and a few other vegetal products of their sterile domain. Most of their food is eaten raw. They neither plant nor cultivate, and are without domestic animals, save dogs which are largely of coyote blood. 105

The habitations of the Seri are flimsy bowers of cactus and shrubbery, sometimes shingled rudely with turtle-shells and sponges; in some

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105 cases these are in clusters pertaining to matronymic family groups; in other cases they are isolated, and are then often abandoned and reoccupied repeatedly, and are apparently common property of the tribe. The habitations afford some protection from sun and wind, but not from cold and wet, which are hardly known in winterless and nearly rainless Seriland.

The Seri clothing consists essentially of a kilt or skirt extending from waist to knees; sometimes a pelican-skin robe is worn as a blanket or mantle, and used also as bedding; the head and feet, as well as the bust and arms, are habitually bare, though a loose-sleeved wammus reaching not quite to the waist is sometimes worn. These garments were formerly woven of coarse threads or cords made from native vegetal fibers; the belt is generally of twisted human hair, of horse hair, of dressed deerskin, or of snake skin; the robe consists of four, six, or eight pelican skins sewed together with sinew. The pelican-skin robes are still used, though the aboriginal fabric is commonly replaced by cotton stuffs obtained through barter or plunder. Cords of human hair and skins of serpents are used for necklaces.

The sports and games of the Seri Indians include racing and dancing, and there are ceremonial dances at the girls' puberty feasts, accompanying the rude music of improvised drums. Decoration is ordinarily limited to symbolic face-painting, which is seen especially among the females, and to crude ornamentation of the scanty apparel. A peculiar pottery is manufactured, and the pieces are sometimes decorated with simple designs in plain colors.

The bow and arrow are habitually used, especially in warfare, and turtles and fish are taken by means of harpoons, shafted with cane and usually tipped with bone, charred wood, or flotsam metal. The arrows are sometimes provided with chipped stone points, though the art of chipping seems to be accultural and shamanistic. The ordinary stone implements are used for crushing bone and severing sinew or flesh, and also for mulling seeds and other food substances; they are mere cobbles, selected for fitness, and retained only if their fitness is increased by the wear of use, after the manner of protolithic culture. Graceful balsas are made from canes, bound together with mesquite-fiber cords; and on these the people freely navigate the narrow but stormy strait separating Tiburon and the neighboring islets from the mainland. They make a distinctive pottery, which is remarkably light and fragile. Its chief use is carrying water to habitations (always located miles from the spring or tinaja) or on desultory wanderings. Shells are used for cups, and to some extent for implements. They have a few baskets, which are not greatly different from those made by neighboring tribes.

The modern Seri are loosely organized in a number of maternal groups or clans, which are notable for the prominence given to mother-right in marriage and for some other customs; and there are indications that the clan organization was more definite before the tribe was so

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greatly reduced. The leading clans are those of the Pelican, the chief tribal tutelary, and the Turtle, a minor tutelary. At present polygyny prevails, professedly and evidently because of the preponderance of females due to the decimation of warriors in battle; but both custom and tradition tell of former monogamy, with a suggestion of polyandry. The primary marriage is negotiated between the mothers of the would-be groom and the prospective bride; if the mother and daughter in the latter family look with favor on the proposal, the candidate is subjected to rigorous tests of material and moral character; and if these are successfully passed the marriage is considered complete, and the husband becomes a privileged and permanent guest in the wife's household. Family feeling, especially maternal affection, is strong; but petty dissensions are common save when internal peace is constrained by external strife. The strongest tribal characteristic is implacable animosity toward aliens, whether Indian or Caucasian; certainly for three and a half centuries, and probably for many more, the Seri have been almost constantly on the warpath against one alien group or another, and have successfully stayed Spanish, Mexican, and American invasion. In their estimation the brightest virtue is the shedding of alien blood, while the blackest crime in their calendar is alien conjugal union.

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The Seri vocabulary is meager and essentially local; the kinship terms are strikingly scanty, and there are fairly full designations for food materials and other local things, while abstract terms are few. Two or three recorded vocables seem to resemble those of the Yuman languages, while the numerals and all other known terms are distinct. The grammatic construction of Seri speech appears not to differ greatly from that of other tongues of Sonora and Arizona; it is highly complex and associative. The speech is fairly euphonious, much more so than that of the neighboring Papago and Yaqui Indians.

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The Seri Indians appear to recognize a wide variety of mystical potencies and a number of zoic deities, all of rather limited powers. The Pelican, Turtle, Moon, and Sun seem to lead their hierarchy. Creation is ascribed to the Ancient of Pelicans—a mythical bird of marvelous wisdom and melodious song—who first raised Isla Tasnoe, and afterward Tiburon and the rest of the world, above the primeval waters. Individual fetishes are used, and there is some annual ceremony at the time of ripening of cactus fruits, and certain observances at the time of the new moon. The most conspicuous ceremony is the girls' puberty feast. The dead are clothed in their finest raiment, folded and fastened in small compass like Peruvian mummies, placed in shallow graves, and covered with turtle-shells, when the graves are filled with earth and heaped with stones or thorny brambles for protection against beasts of prey. Fetishes, weapons, and other personal belongings are buried with the body, as well as a dish of food and an olla of water, and there are curious customs connected with the place of

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105 sepulture. There is a weird, formal mourning for dead matrons, and suggestions of fear of or veneration for the manes.

Seriland is surrounded with prehistoric works, telling of a numerous 172 population who successfully controlled the scant waters for irrigation, built villages and temples and fortresses, cultivated crops, kept domestic animals, and manufactured superior fictile and textile wares; but (save possibly in one spot) these records of aboriginal culture cease at the borders of Seriland. In their stead a few slightly worn pebbles and bits of pottery are found here and there, deeply embedded in the soil and weathered as by the suns of ages. There are also a few cairns of cobbles marking the burial places, and at least one cobble mound of striking dimensions but of unknown meaning; and there are a few shell-mounds, one so broad and high as to form a cape in the slowly transgressing shoreline (Punta Antigualla), and in which the protolithic implements and other relics are alike from the house-dotted surface to the tide level, 90 feet below.

The absence of relics of a superior culture, and the presence of Seri relics throughout deposits of high antiquity, suggest that the tribe is indigenous to Seriland; and this indication harmonizes with the peculiar isolation of the territory, the lowly culture and warlike habits of the people, the essentially distinct language, the singular marriage custom, and the local character of the beast-gods. And all these features combine to mark the Seri as children of the soil, or autochthones.

Recent Explorations and Surveys

114 Present knowledge of Seriland and its inhabitants is based primarily on the work of two expeditions by the Bureau of American Ethnology, 121 conducted in 1894 and 1895, respectively; and, secondarily, on researches [122] into the cartography and literature (descriptive, historical, and scientific) of the region. Both of the expeditions were projected largely for the purpose of making collections among little-known native tribes in the interests of the National Museum, and the general ethnologic inquiries were ancillary to this purpose.

The 1894 expedition was directed chiefly toward work among the Papago Indians in the vaguely defined territory known as Papagueria, lying south of Gila river and west of the Sierra Madre in southwestern Arizona and western Sonora (Mexico). Outfitting at Tucson early [122] in October, the party moved southward, visiting the known Papago rancherias and seeking others, and thus defining the eastern limits of the Papago country. On the approach to the southern limits of the tribal range toward Rio Sonora, the evil repute of the Seri Indians sounded larger and larger, suggesting the desirability of scientific study of the tribe; and it was decided to attempt investigation. Accordingly the party was reorganized at Hermosillo, and, with the 114 sanction of the Secretary of State and Acting Governor, Señor Don Ramón Corral, proceeded to Rancho San Francisco de Costa Rica,

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X 175 during the rainy season, which only lasts about a month or six weeks", nor "any vestige of Indians to be seen except a solitary hut erected by the Tiburons to serve them when they go there to fish"; and, noting the report that Padre Kino had visited this point, he quite appositely questioned the truth of the tradition, partly on the ground of the absence of fresh water, partly because "the Tepoca Indian establishment" mentioned in the tradition "is many leagues farther to the northward." Awakened by an approaching storm, he was under way next morning at daylight, and, getting out of the "bad holding ground", was caught by a gale and carried back to his "old anchorage in Freshwater Bay", where he found the Indians rejoicing over the success of a ceremonial incantation to which they ascribed his return. The reconnaissance map [114] is ill-drawn, locating "Fresh Water B." on the mainland side and apparently combining "Sargent's Point" and "Arnold's Island" as "Sargents I."; "San Miguel Pt." is properly located, and idealized route lines traverse the "Canal peligroso de San Miguel" (El Infernillo), which is of greatly exaggerated width. The careful itinerary shows, however, that Hardy scarcely entered this strait, and made but three or four anchorages in the vicinity—i. e., in Bahia Agua Dulce, in Bahia Bruja, probably in Cockle harbor (or "Cochia Inlet"), and finally off Isla Patos.

Hardy's notes on the Indians are first hand, and hence of exceptional [114] value. He says:

● 105 X 175 The Indians on the island of Tiburon are very stout, tall, and well-built fellows, exceedingly like the Twakehli tribe of Indians in Patagonia, and with a language so like theirs that I imagined I was transported back into those wild regions. They by no means look so ferocious as they are represented, and there is something peculiarly mild in the countenances of the females. Their dress is a sort of blanket, extending from the hips to the knees. But most of the old women have this part of the body covered with the skins of the eagle, having the feathers turned *towards the flesh*. The upper part of the body is entirely exposed, and their hair is dressed on the top of the head in a knot which greatly sets off the effect of their painted faces. The men use bows and stone-pointed arrows; but whether they are poisoned I do not know. They use likewise a sort of wooden mallet called Macána, *for close quarters in war*. They have a curious weapon which they employ for catching fish. It is a spear with a double point, forming an angle of about 5 degrees. The insides of these two points, which are 6 inches long, are jagged; so that when the body of a fish is forced between them it can not get away on account of the teeth.[1]

He saw "about fifteen or twenty canoes made of three long bamboo bundles fastened together", and observed that, when engaged in turtle fishing, the Indian "paddles himself from the shore on one of these by means of a long elastic pole of about 12 or 14 feet in length, the wood of which is the root of a thorn called mesquite, growing near the coast", this pole serving also as a harpoon shaft, provided with a harpoon head and cord, such as those still in use. Respecting the inventory appurtenances, he says:

My attention was directed by the old women to a pile of bushes outside the hut, which had a staff of about 5 feet in length sticking up through the center. From

[1] Op. cit., p. 349-350.

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the upper end of the staff was suspended by a cord 12 or 14 inches long a round stone ball, and to this ball was fastened another string furnished with bits of cork, surrounded with small feathers stuck into them at the distance of about 3 inches apart: the only use of the stone ball being to prevent the wind from blowing out horizontally the string which was furnished with feathers. . . . Upon examining the bunky pile, I discovered a wooden figure with a carved hat, and others of different shapes and sizes, as well also as feathern bags, the contents of which I was not permitted to explore.[1]

He also mentions that "in their festivities the Indians wear the head (with the horns on)" of the buro or mule deer. He adds:

It is believed that the Córas Indians have discovered a method of poisoning their arrows, and that they do it in this way: They kill a cow and take from it its liver. They then collect a number of rattlesnakes, scorpions, centipedes, and tarantulas, which they confine in a hole with the liver. The next process is to beat them with sticks in order to enrage them, and being thus infuriated, they fasten their fangs and exhaust their venom upon each other and upon the liver. When the whole mass is in a high state of corruption the old women take the arrows and pass their points through it. They are then allowed to dry in the shade, and it is said that a wound inflicted by them will prove fatal. Others again say that the poison is obtained from the juice of the yerba de la flecha (arrow wort).[2]

He purchased some of the arrows, which were stone-tipped, and had "certainly had an unguent applied to them".

He was impressed by indications of family affection, and noted the custom of having two wives. Concerning tribal relations he says:

These people have been always considered extremely ferocious, and there is little doubt, from their brave and warlike character, that they may formerly have devastated a great part of the country; but in modern days their feuds are nearly confined to a neighboring tribe of the same name as themselves (Córas), who speak the same language and in all probability originally descended from the same stock. They are said to be inferior to those of this island both in courage and stature, and they are never suffered to cross the channel. From what I was told . . . the Tiburow Córas have lately returned from a sanguinary war with the Tépoca Córas, in which the former were victorious.[3]

Later in his itinerary Hardy noted a typical Yaqui revolution, with a characteristic effort to secure the cooperation of the Seri.[4] He defined the Seri habitat as "the island of Tiburow, the coast of Tépoca, and the pueblo of Los Córas, near Pitic";[5] and he estimated the population at "3,000 or 4,000 at the very utmost",[6] and quoted the estimate of Don José María Retio, viz, that the Seri population of Tiburon was 1,000 to 1,500.[7]

Like most of those visitors to the Seri who have returned to tell their tale, Hardy "praised the bridge that carried him over" and gave the tribe passable character—worse, of course, than that of any other, yet hardly so bad as painted at Pitic.

A noteworthy traveler in western America during 1840–1842 was M. Duflot de Mofras, an attaché of the French legation in Mexico. He

[1] Op. cit., pp. 286–288.
[2] Ibid., pp. 288, 289.
[3] Ibid., pp. 289, 290.
[4] Ibid., p. 295 et seq.
[5] Ibid., p. 427.
[6] Ibid., p. 428.
[7] Ibid., pp. 225, 340.

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The captives were imprisoned over night in the mint, the children weeping, the women chattering angrily or humbly, and the men sulking. Next day the Hermosilleños began distributing the children among themselves, some families taking three and many two, while the adults were transferred to Pueblo Seri, placed in charge of a single keeper, and set to gathering fuel, etc. Naturally this unstable status did not long persist; "within two months they began to disappear, fleeing to their respective and native haunts, stealing and carrying with them the children from whom they had been separated";[1] and, according to Espence, they committed "many murders on the Pitic and Guaimas roads" as they returned to Tiburon.[2]

While the Tiburon captives were escaping, the campaigning continued; and, in November, 1844, several Seri families, comprising 63 men, women, and children, who had been scavengering Rancho del Burro ("manteniéndose allí á merced de los desperdicios de dicho rancho"),[3] were captured and transported to the mint at Hermosillo, and soon afterward transferred to Pueblo Seri. During the same month a report came from Rancho del Pocito, on the Guaymas road, that Seri marauders (assumed to belong to the 16 families left on the island) had killed 10 head of stock; and a detachment of 15 cavalry was sent to inflict punishment. Early in December this party met a Seri force of over seventy warriors, including some of those captured on Tiburon and escaped from Pueblo Seri; after a battle of four hours the troops found their ammunition exhausted, several of their carbines out of order, and all but four or five of their horses winded; so that they were driven to parley with the Indians and to procure their surrender by pacific means—especially promises of good treatment.[4] Subsequently a municipal commission from Hermosillo reminded the defeated Seri of their surrender, and "three, four, or eight" of them presented themselves ("presentándose tres, cuatro ú ocho hombres"), and were probably added to the colony at Pueblo Seri.

Espence's journal clearly indicates a complete circumnavigation of Tiburon, the second in history (that of Ugarte in 1721 being the first); and naturally some of his notes are of ethnologic value:

The Ceris Indians are tall, well formed, not very corpulent; the women are remarkable for small breasts and feet and high instep. At night they travel ill; this is to be attributed to the reflection of the sun on the sand, which is quite white, and as they all live on the shore where they gain sustenance, which is fish and plankton [mariscu], they are daily exposed to a glare which injures their vision. Their favorite food is turtles and horses. . . . They are all in the most savage condition it is possible to conceive. Their language is guttural, and they are most filthy in their persons, as in their food, which is mostly eaten raw, or at the best half

[1] Velasco, Noticias Estadísticas, p. 127.
[2] Ibid., p. 179.
[3] Ibid., p. 128.
[4] Ibid., p. 129. This native recital is far from unique among the chronicles of conquest over the Seri. All of the records recount victories more or less brilliant, even when there are strong indications between lines that the Conquistadores were outnumbered, outfought, forced from the field, and even driven into the protection of the pueblos. The Seri side of the story has never been told.

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+175 soaked; they endure a thousand miseries on the island, yet the love they have for it is incredible. They are always accompanied by innumerable dogs, . . . which they have domesticated.[1]

Velasco adds:

The Cuna subsist on fish, the seeds of grass, and countless shrubs, as well as on the flesh of horses and deer, which they kill. There is no better proof of this fact than this—on approaching the said Cuna, one instantly perceives that their bodies exhale an intolerable stench, like that of a corpse of eight or more days, totally rotten, so that it is necessary to withdraw far as possible from them.[2]

Of all the Indian tribes known in Sonora, none are more barbarous and uncivilized than the Cuna. They are perverse to the limit, vicious beyond compare in drunkenness, infinitely filthy, the bitterest enemies of the whites, like the worst of the Indians.[3]

He adds also that the men wear a pelican-skin robe and a breechclout of cotton cloth, with most of the body uncovered; "they have their faces painted or barred with prominent black lines. They use no foot-gear of any kind, and many have the nasal septum pierced and adorned with pieces of greenstone or ordinary glass." "They are robust in stature, tall and straight, generally with bright black eyes. The women are not uncomely, and of bronzy color [de color abronzado]. Their clothing is made of pelican skins fastened together, retaining the feathers; with this they are covered from the waist downward", the remainder of the body being bare. The women of Hermosillo provide them with cast off garments when they approach the city, and these they wear, unwashed, until they fall to pieces. "The said tribe, in addition to being the vilest and most brutal known in the country, are preeminently treacherous and traitorous, so that forty of their outbreaks may be counted during the efforts to reduce them to civilized life." At the time of the Cimarrones outbreak, the Seri of Tiburon and Tepoka numbered 2,000;
[161] "to day [about 1846 or 1847], counting the 230, which are all that inhabit Tiburon and the most that can be presented, including the Tepoka Seri [los Ceris Tepocas], who have always been much fewer, their whole number will not amount to 500 persons of all sexes and ages, and the warriors can not exceed 60 or 80 at the most." The Seri are not polygamous, though apparently promiscuous ("se nota en sus matrimonios mucha tolerancia mútamente"). They "adore the moon, which they venerate and respect as a deity; when they see the new moon, they kneel and make obeisance; they kiss the earth and make a thousand genuflections, beating their breasts."[4]

+175 The remarkably vigorous expedition of Alvarado and Espence occurred within the memory of men still active, and naturally it lives in tradition at Hermosillo and Bacuachi, and among the ranchos lying toward the border of Seriland; indeed, one of the two Mexicans accompanying the 1895 expedition, Don Ygnacio Lezania, retained shadowy impressions of participating in an invasion of the island, which could have been none other than that planned by Governor De

[1] Velasco, Noticias Estadísticas, pp. 169-171.
[2] Ibid., p. 170.
[3] Ibid., pp. 127-128.
[4] Ibid., pp. 131-132.

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†175 premature termination of the work, few of the observations and other results were ever published. General Stone himself traveled extensively in Sonora, and delved deeply in the historical records of northern Mexico; and, while there is no indication that he ever came in personal [114] contact with the Seri, he collected and sifted current local information relating to the tribe with notable acumen. In certain "Notes" prepared in Washington in December, 1860, he wrote:

105 †175 The *Curis* are a peculiar tribe of Indians occupying the island of Tiburon and the neighboring coast. They are yet in a perfectly savage state, and live solely by fishing and hunting. Having been at war with the whites from the time of the first missions, they have become reduced in numbers to about 300, counting some 90 warriors. They are of large stature, well made, and athletic. In war and in the chase they make use of poisoned arrows, the wounds from which are almost always fatal. In preparing the poison, it is said they procure the liver of a deer or cow, and by irritating rattlesnakes and scorpions with it, cause it to be struck by a great many of these reptiles. They then hang up the mass to putrefy in a bag, and in the drippings of this bag they soak their arrowheads. I can not vouch for the truth of this statement, but it is current in Sonora. I was informed by a gentleman in Hermosillo that one of his servants, who was slightly shot by a Cori's arrow, died quickly from the effect of the wound (which mortified almost immediately) in spite of the best medical treatment. Their language is guttural, and very different from any other Indian idiom in Sonora. It is said that on one occasion some of these Indians passed by a shop in Guaymas, where some Welsh sailors were talking, and on hearing the Welsh language spoken, stopped, listened, and appeared much interested, declaring that those white men were their brothers, for they had a tongue like their own. They are very filthy in their habits, and are said to be worshipers of the moon.[1]

†175 Another Mexican traveler of note who collected local and contemporary information concerning the Seri, though enjoying no more than slight inimical contact with them, was Herr Clemens A. Pajeken, of Bremen (for some time a resident of California). He classed as wild Indians ("Wilde Indianer, Indios bronces") the Seri and Apache tribes. Of the former he wrote:

105 †175 Curis. This is a small tribe, their number not exceeding 400 souls, or rather head (dasses Seelenzahl oder besser Kopfzahl); yet the government of the State could not restrain this little band of robbers and marauders that for more than twenty years have perpetrated their atrocities on travelers between the port of Guaymas and the city of Hermosillo, the metropolis of the State. . . . The Curis appear not to grasp the idea that they are human. Like the prey-beasts of the wilderness, they go out to slay men and animals, sparing only their own kind. In many respects they are viler than the beasts, since they slay without need merely to satisfy a lust for slaughter. They are not only the simplest and laziest of the Indians of Sonora, but also the most treacherous and deceitful. During the Spanish rule, from the time the first visit was made to lead them toward social life, they have rebelled more than forty times. Only a couple of families [sin pasar Familias] still reside in the village [Pueblo Seri], where they make clubs and subsist on the offal of the shambles. The proper home of these barbarians is the island of Tiburon and the adjacent coasts, whither they return after their outbreaks, although it is an incredibly desert region. Thence they repair to the highways to kill travelers and arri-

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[1] Notes on the State of Sonora, by Charles P. Stone, 1860; Washington, 1861, p. 18. Reprinted in Historical Magazine, vol. v, 1861, pp. 180-186.

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orus, or to the ridges to steal cattle. They confine themselves to the bow and arrow, and the latter are poisoned, so that every wound made by them is deadly, or at least highly dangerous. On my second journey into the interior of the country my horse received an arrow in the hip; the arrow, which entered 4 inches, could not be withdrawn until the following day; and for seven months the wound suppurated. . . . Their chief food consists of oysters, mussels, snakes, with fish and other sea food, which they consume entirely raw and which surrounds them with an intolerable stench; though this may be partly due to their exceeding uncleanliness, since the process of washing is wholly unknown to them. Their clothing consists of a kilt of pelican skin. They tattoo their faces, and some pierce their noses to insert a certain green stone [obsidian]. They are of dark copper color, large and strongly built. Although in their faces no human sentiments can be discerned, yet they can not be called ugly. Their limbs are so beautifully proportioned that the Spanish ladies in Hermosillo view with envy the slender shapes and the comely hands and feet of the young Ceris maidens. They wear no headdresses, and as their coarse, shaggy hair is neither combed nor cleaned, it sticks out in tangled tufts in all directions like spines on a hedgehog; this alone gives them a forbidding appearance. Their speech is quite like their character; it is guttural, discordant, and meager, resembling more the howling of wild animals than human speech, wherefore it is difficult for a human to learn. They have no religion—at least, I do not deem the gambols and amusing capers in which they indulge at the new moon to be religious customs. The tribe is constantly diminishing in numbers, and it is hoped they may soon disappear from the earth by natural decrease—unless the State government sooner undertakes a war of extermination.[1]

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Herr Pajeken's record bears inherent evidence (at least to one familiar with the region) of reflecting the current local knowledge and opinion concerning the Seri with unsurpassed—indeed unequaled—fidelity; and it is also of value in that it indicates the approximate number of the tribe then surviving in Pueblo Seri, and in that it gives the contemporary estimate of the tribal population.

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Among the more careful students of the Seri at second hand should be mentioned Buckingham Smith, an enthusiastic collector, translator, and publisher of rare Americana. In the introduction to an anonymous and dateless grammar of the Heve language he wrote in 1861:

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The lower Pima are in the west of the province [of Sonora], having many towns extending to the frontier of the indomitable Seri, who live some 20 leagues to the north of the mouth of the Hiaqui, and have their farthest limit inland some dozen leagues from the sea, finding shelter among the ridges and in the neighboring island of Tiburon.

He added in a note:

The Guaimas speak nearly the same language as the Seri, are few in number, and live among the Hiaqui in Belen and elsewhere, having retreated before the sanguinary fury of their conquerors.[2]

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While the scientific knowledge of the Seri began with Bartlett's visit, it assumed definite shape only through the classic researches of Don Francisco Pimentel (Count Herras) in the early sixties. His analysis and classification of the Seri tongue rest on a short vocabulary

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[1] Reise-Erinnerungen und Abenteuer aus der neuen Welt in ethnographischen Bildern, von F. A. Pajeken; Bremen, 1861, pp. 97-98.

[2] A Grammatical Sketch of the Heve Language, translated from an unpublished Spanish manuscript in Library of American Linguistics, vol. iii, New York, 1861, p. 7.

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limited as it is to a single line of symbolic portrayal, is still more abjectly meagre.

Any comparison of the Seri esthetic with that of other Amerind tribes serves only to emphasize its paucity: the tribes of the plains, with their eagle-feather headdresses, elaborately arranged scalp-locks, widely varied face-painting, and ritualistic camp circles; the Pueblo peoples, with their ornate masks, elaborate altars, figured staffs, and painted pottery; the denizens of the eastern woods, with their feather-decked peace-pipes, divinatory games, fringe-bordered garments, and prayer-inscribed arrows; the coastwise peoples of the upper Pacific, with their labrets and tattoo-marks, totem-poles and carved house-fronts, painted canoes and prodigal potlatches; the neighboring desert tribes, with their festal footraces, decorated pottery and basketry, pendent scarfs and garters, and well-wrought caskets for family fetishes; even the timid acorn-eaters of California, with their sacramental baskets, artistically befringed kilts, bead-strings of far-traveled nacre, and patiently wrought fabrics of rare feathers—all of these seem rich in esthetic motives when contrasted with "los pobrecitos" of arid Seriland. And the contrast is only intensified when the economic motives of the various tribes are compared: the industrial motives of the Seri are fairly numerous and diverse; they are skilful huntsmen, successful fishermen, capable navigators, and competent warriors (as attested by the protection of their principality for centuries), so that despite the absence of agriculture and the avoidance of commerce, their industrial range is not very far below the aboriginal average; and while they are deficient in thrift, this shortcoming is balanced by a peculiarly developed vital economy whereby they are delicately adjusted to their environment, as has been already shown. On the whole, it would appear that the Seri are not only lower in esthetic development than the contemporary tribes thus far studied, but also that they stand at the bottom of the scale in the ratio of esthetic to industrial motives.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DECORATION

Largely through recent researches among the American aborigines, it has been shown that decorative and many if not all other esthetic concepts normally arise in symbolism, gradually expand in conventionism, and eventually mature in a realism which is itself the source of ever-extending esthetic motives; and the observations on the lowly Seri afford opportunity for somewhat extending the generalizations based on higher tribes.

When peoples of unequal cultural development are compared, it is commonly found that the higher are the more independent in action and thought: thus, advanced peoples make conquest of nature for their own behoof, while primitive peoples are largely creatures of environment; Caucasian citizens are self-conscious lawmakers, while Amerind tribesmen are semiconsciously dominated by mysteries fearsomely

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

INDUSTRIES AND INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS

105 The pacific vocations of the Seri are few. They are totally without agriculture, and even devoid of agricultural sense, though they consume certain fruits and seeds in season; they are without domestic animals, though they live in cotoleration with half-wild dogs, and perhaps with pelicans; and they are without commerce, save that primitive and inimical interchange commonly classed as pillage and robbery. Accordingly, their pacific industries are limited to those connected with (1) sustentation, chiefly by means of fishing and the chase; (2) navigation and carrying, (3) house-building, (4) appareling, and (5) manufacturing their simple implements and utensils; and these constructive industries are balanced and conditioned by the destructive avocation of (6) nearly continuous warfare.

FOOD AND FOOD-GETTING

312 The primary resource of Seriland is raised to the first place in realized importance only by its rarity, viz, potable water—a commodity so abundant in most regions as to divert conscious attention from its paramount role in physiologic function as well as in industrial economy. The overwhelming importance of this food-source is worthy of closer attention than it usually receives. Classed by function, human foods are (1) nutrients, including animal and vegetal substances which are largely assimilated and absorbed into the system; (2) assimilants, including condiments, etc, which promote alimentation and apparently aid metabolism; (3) paratriptics, or waste preventers, including alcohol and other stimulants, which in some little-understood way retard the waste of tissue and consequent dissipation of vital energy; and (4) diluents, which modify the consistency of solid foods and thereby facilitate assimilation, besides maintaining the water of the system. Classed by chemic constitution, the foods may be divided into (1) proteids, or nitrogenous substances, including the more complex animal and vegetal compounds; (2) fats, or nonnitrogenous substances in which the ratio of hydrogen and oxygen is unlike that of water, and which are second in complexity among animal and vegetal compounds; (3) carbohydrates, or nonnitrogenous compounds of carbon with hydrogen and oxygen in the proportions required to form water, which are among the simpler vegetal and animal compounds; and (4) minerals, chiefly water, with relatively minute quantities of various salts. Both classifications are somewhat indefinite, largely because most articles of food combine two or more of the classes; yet they are useful in that they indicate the high place of the simple mineral water among food substances. Quantitatively this constituent stands far in the lead among foods; the human adult consumes a daily mean of about 4½ pounds of simple liquids and 2½ pounds of nominally solid, but actually more than half watery, food; so that the

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

000 and groups; the linguistic activities serve to extend social relations in space and time, and the sophic activities to integrate and perpetuate all relations; but it is through the industrial activities that human intelligence interacts with physical nature and makes conquest of the material world. Accordingly, industries act as a steady and never-ceasing stimulus to intelligence; accordingly, too, the industrial activities afford the simplest and surest measure of intellectual advancement.

Under this view of the place of industrial activities in human phylogeny, certain phases of Seri technology acquire importance and especial significance.

105 177 1. One of the most conspicuous features of Seri craft is its local character. The foodstuffs, the materials for apparel and habitations, and the substances utilized in the several lines of simple handicraft are essentially local; moreover, the characteristic methods and devices evidently reflect local environmental conditions. There are, indeed, a few phenomena suggesting, and a still less number demonstrating, extraneous origin; the balsa and the kilt are sufficiently similar to devices of other districts to suggest, though not to prove, genetic identity (indeed, the sum of indications of local origin is much weightier than the several suggestions of extraneous derivation); the iron harpoon-points and arrow-tips are mainly of local flotsam, and are essentially provincial in modes of employment; the chipped stone arrow-tips, though local in material, are foreign in motive; but on summarizing the industrial phenomena, it would appear that by far the greater share are essentially local, while the few of exceptional (and extraneous) character can be pretty definitely traced to importation through the social interactions of recent centuries.

105 182 13 2. An equally conspicuous feature of the industrial craft of the Seri is the dominance of chance in both processes and devices. The traditional "fisherman's luck" is made exceptionally uncertain by the sudden gales and shifting currents of Seriland shores, while the absolute necessaries of life on land are still more capricious than those alongshore; this uncertainty of resources has profoundly affected the somatic features of the tribesman, as indicated elsewhere (ante, p. 150); and that the mental attributes of the folk are even more profoundly affected is attested by the rôle played by chance in the selection and shapement of the prevailing tools of stone and shell. The large rôle of chance in Seri life is also revealed, though less directly, in the overweening [771] mysticism of zootheistic faith, with its material reflection in zoomimic craft.

3. When the local and fortuitous features of the Seri industries are juxtaposed they are found to express a notably inchoate or primitive stage of industrial development. In both the local and the fortuitous or accidental aspects, the activities are so closely adjusted to the immediate environment as to approach the instinctive agencies and movements of bestial life, and correspondingly to diverge from the composite

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895);1898 NU31 Seri NU31

and cosmopolite characters of higher humanity; the dearth of extraneous devices denotes absence or intolerance of that acultural interchange accompanying and marking the progress of peoples; and the dearth of inventions denotes feebleness of creative faculty and absence of that self-confidence which accompanies and measures progress in nature-conquest. 105 13 182 [177]

4. When the local and fortuitous features of the Seri craft are viewed in their serial or sequential relations, they are found to reflect and attest autochthonal development. Excepting the few acultural processes and devices whose acquisition may confidently be traced to certain social interactions of the historic period, the Seri technic is too closely tied to local environment to warrant any supposition of importation from other districts. The question of the birthplace of the people may be left open in this case as in every other; but the birthplace of practically all those activities and activital products which define the folk as human was manifestly Seriland itself—so that the tribe, considered as a human folk rather than as a zoic variety, must be classed as autochthonous. 105 177

Summarily, then, the Seri industries are significant as (1) local, (2) fortuitous, (3) primitive, and (4) autochthonous; and these features combine to illumine a noteworthy stage in primitive thought. 185

5. On juxtaposing these significant features of Seri technic, they are found to reflect the tribal mind with noteworthy fidelity, and hence to indicate the sources of Seri mentations, and of the local culture in which these mentations are integrated. The local foodstuffs—especially that vital standard of values in arid regions, water—are periodic sources of the strongest aspirations and inspirations of industrial life, and the methods and devices for food-getting are but the legitimate offspring of the inevitable relation between effort and environment; the conspicuous rôle of chance is but the composite of the hard and capricious environment on the one hand, and of the lowly thought reflecting that environment on the other hand; the zoic faith into which the magma of recurrent chance has semicrystallized finds carnate symbols either in local beasts or in fantastic monsters suggested by those beasts; even the mating instinct, second only to thirst among the impelling action-factors of the folk, is so profoundly and bitterly provincial as to exclude foreign ideals to a degree unparalleled among known peoples. The industrial materials are local—but not more local than the thoughts in which they are reflected; the technical methods are unmistakably the offspring of the environment—but they are equally the offspring of minds reflecting that environment and no other; the few and simple devices stand for integrations of experiences, instinctive rather than ratiocinative, the germ of invention rather than even its opening bud—but the experiences bear the marks of that environment and no other. Accordingly, the mental side of Seri industry, and, indeed, of all Seri life, appears to be the counterpart of the physical side. 13 181 182

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

but as the vicarious and visible exponent of an ever-immanent beast-god—the clan tutelary; her appeals to her brothers for administrative aid are precisely parallel to her intuitive passage from zoomimicry into the field of mechanical chance defined by protolithic implements; and the appeal, like the execution of the law either by herself or by her brothers, is controlled and regulated in absolute deference to the zoic pantheon. Thus, the inchoate tribal laws, expressed in habitual lines of action and modes of thought, are by no means conscious products of human wisdom, but are confidently imputed to a superhuman wisdom on the part of myth-magnified beasts of a mystical olden time; and, similarly, the power of executing these laws is by no means cognized as conscious human faculty, but is faithfully imputed to supernal potencies of mythical monsters. Essentially, therefore, the tribal law is putatively *zoocratic;* and the social organization may justly be classed as a putative *zoocracy.*

To prevent possible confusion, it may be desirable to note specifically that the Seri government is not matriarchal in any proper sense. As pointed out elsewhere, matriarchy is not (at least among the American aborigines) an antecedent of patriarchy, but a correlative of that form of government; and it would be especially erroneous and misleading to designate as matriarchal a tribe like the Seri, whose chiefs and subchiefs (i. e., appellate clan-administratives) are invariably masculine. Neither would it be just, despite the dominance of matrons in legislative and judicative matters, to regard the tribal government as a gynecocracy, such as have been noted in various parts of North America—e. g., in Sonora, according to a current tradition as to the origin of the name of the province, and among the Pomo Indians of California, according to Cronise as interpreted by Powers;[1] for the actual control is exercised by the warrior brothers, while the ideal control is vested in that zoic pantheon of which the matrons are putative mouthpieces. Physically and practically the Seri government is an adelphiarchy, as already indicated; but in the minds of the tribesmen themselves it is an inchoate theocracy putatively headed by a pantheon of animate monsters, whose prelates are personified in the painted clan-mothers.

Summarily, then, the Seri are zoocosmatic in esthetic, zoömimic in technic, zootheistic in faith, and putatively zoocratic in government, while even the Seri tongue is so largely mimetic or onomatopoetic in form as to accord with the industries and institutions; and in view of the intimate interrelations between the several lines of activity, it would seem preferable to determine the culture-status from the coincident testimony of all the lines, but feasible to measure it in terms of any one or more of these activital lines.

Now, on comparing the characteristics of the Seri with those of other known tribes of North America, many resemblances and a few differ-

[1] Tribes of California, pp. 220-221.

3:Davis & Dawson E-5 (1922-1940) 1945
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FIG. 2. THE PELICAN SKIN ROBE
A TYPICAL WOMAN'S GARMENT BEFORE THE ADVENT OF THE COTTON CLOTH AND RAGS THAT REPLACED IT.

191 bounded coastal plain, lived a life so independent and so oblivious of the outside world that they might well have been on another planet.

182 The hard, inhospitable natural environment afforded by Seriland long ago moulded
● 105 the characteristics of its people and their whole mode of life. The distance between reliable food sources in the sea and supplies of fresh water created a pedestrian habit whereby they acquired a remarkable fleetness of foot and tremendous physical endurance against thirst and weariness on the trail. The monotonous sea-food diet induced a wandering, roving life in search of game and vegetal produce to supplement their meager rations. They became a homeless, burden-bearing people, wandering in family

[p. 194(A)]

105 groups or clans between the waterholes and
182 their temporary dwellings by the sea, chasing for game or searching for cactus fruits, sleeping wherever weariness overtook them, or where the successful end of a hunt left them gorged and drowsy. Under a climate where frost is almost unknown they needed no protection except from the sun, and built no other dwellings than their brush-heap jacals (Fig. 3). Living in animal-like savagery, without commerce or industry, the Seri's every bodily character and function were directed toward the provision, day by day, of the food and water necessary for life.

312 Potable water, a commodity so abundant in most regions as to divert conscious attention from its paramount role in physiologic function and in industrial economy, attained in Seriland the primary place of importance because of its rarity. In that arid land it is scanty to the extreme. Two thirds of the meager supply is confined to a single rivulet in the interior of Tiburon Island (Fig. 4). Because of this and other widely separated aguajes within the island whose shores provided the greater part of their food resources, the Seris early found this island the most tolerable habitat in their desolate realm.

225 The most conspicuous single article in the
[262] dietary of the Seri, and undoubtedly that which first determined the location of his habitat, is the green sea turtle which is abundant throughout the Gulf of California, but particularly so in the narrow channel between Tiburon Island and the mainland. There the shallow lagoons abound with its marine grass food plant, and the sandy beaches provide optimum conditions for egg laying and hatching. In consequence of this natural provision for abundant food, easily obtained, perhaps half the aggregate life of the Seri tribe came to be spent within easy reach of the feeding and breeding grounds of the turtle.

[361] The most extensive and permanent of all Seri communities was established on the channel side of the island, just back of the lagoon in which the turtles feed and whose sands provided eggs and the succulent flesh
225 of newly-hatched turtle young. When fe-
501 males could not be captured at the laying grounds, the big chelonians were speared

[p. 194(B)]

[text continues on p 195(B)]

3:Davis & Dawson E-5 (1922-1940) 1945
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[123]

their minds and to live among them without undue fear of losing his life. Through the kindness of Señor Thomson the senior author succeeded in making himself a friend of the Seri and, enlarging upon this friendship through long periods of living and traveling among them, has acquired an intimate knowledge of these strange people.

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In 1922 the fishing industry of the Gulf of California was not yet well developed, and it was to be ten years before the village of Kino should appear on the maps of the Sonora coast. The Seris were still isolated in their desert domain and their numbers, then about 250, were maintaining themselves out of reach of the infectious diseases of the white man. The clan life had disappeared, and the people lived as a single tribe with their old chief, Juan Tomas, 90 years old at that time

[161]

[291]
[481]
[482]
[415]

FIG. 15. MOVING DAY AMONG THE SERIS
THESE BURDENS, BORNE FOR MANY MILES OVER ROCKS, THROUGH CACTUS AND DEEP SAND, CONTAIN UTENSILS FOR HOUSEKEEPING WHEREVER THE SERIS MAY STOP.

[p.263(B)]

3:Davis & Dawson E-5 (1922-1940) 1965
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178 and a veteran of nearly a century of warfare against the soldiers of Sonora. The turtle remained their most important source of food, and the pitahaya harvest the most enjoyed. The crafts of their old culture were largely gone, however. Hoop-iron had come in for many uses: harpoon points, scrapers, and knives. The bow and arrow had been almost entirely supplanted by rifles of which the tribe possessed more than thirty. The handmade olla was fast disappearing in favor of the five-gallon tin can, and water
[482] carrying, now much done by the males, was accomplished by means of a palanca, borne on the heavily calloused shoulder, to which a can was suspended from each end.

It seemed that the balsa building art was
178 encountered barely as it passed into extinc-
396 tion, for the last balsa known to have been made by the Seris was found in use near
[126] Kino, in 1922. This rare prize was immediately bargained for and in exchange it was agreed that the tribesman should have lumber to build a boat large enough for all the people of his family. A few months later the finished craft, caulked with a "pitch" made

[p. 264(A)]

5:Dawson N-5 (1940) 1944 NU31 Seri NU31

DESERT
PLANT LIFE

SIXTEENTH YEAR NUMBER 9

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SOME ETHNOBOTANICAL NOTES ON THE SERI INDIANS

105 121 If the natural resources of a region may be said to reflect the degree of cultural and social development of its aboriginal people, we may easily understand why the Seris of Sonora, now approaching extinction and with much modified habits and culture, are considered the most primitive and savage of American Indians. Certainly the arid coast of Sonora, destitute [133] of water but for a few widely separated, stagnant holes, with a dry, rocky soil habitable only by the most frugal and thorny of desert vegetation, presents little in the way of resources to a native people. It was, indeed, [262] only along the ocean shore that the Seris found animal food sufficient to sustain them, principally, the sea turtle and the pelican. This food source proved adequate to support a tribe of some 2000 in pre-Columbian times, but the limited habitat of the pelican and turtle brought about extreme isolation of the people. Thirty-mile-long Tiburon Island became their principal home, separated from the mainland by the narrow but tempestuous channel, El Infiernillo, across which they frequently voyaged in their buoyant balsas to search out vegetal supplements to their monotonous sea food diet. It is this use of vegetable materials, not only as food but in other phases of the domestic economy of these people in earlier times, with which these notes are particularly concerned.

225 Primary occupation of the Seris aside from their continual movement to and from the water holes was, necessarily, their search for food, for they cultivated nothing and conserved little. Fish were exceedingly abundant in the waters around their island, but their very limited tool sense, pro- [227] viding them with almost no fishing devices, excluded much of this food from their diet. Clams and other shellfish were to be had, but it was the abundant green sea turtle, feeding upon luxuriant growths of marine grass, *Ruppia maritima*, in the shallow, sandy lagoons along El Infiernillo, that provided their meat staple. The turtles could be captured with ease during egg laying season as they crawled over the beach, but at other times they had to be 396 speared from a watercraft. No sizable timber grows in Seriland and before the advent of flotsam boards and hoop-iron it would have strained the

5:Dawson N-5 (1940) 1944 NU31 Seri NU31

an important handicraft among these Indians. They made a shallow, coil type basket such as is characteristic of many southwestern tribes. The Seri basket, however, was remarkable for its extreme lightness in proportion to capacity, a quality due to the spongy character of the coil made of a whisp of splints of the torote. Several torotes are found in the region, the commonest species being *Jatropha cardiophylla*. Also used were the torote amarillo, *Jatropha spatulata*, torote blanco, *Bursera microphylla*, and torote prieto, *Bursera laxiflora*. The woof consisted of splints of palo blanco, *Acacia Willardiana*, or of baraprieta, *Caesalpinia gracilis*, deftly interlaced by means of a bone awl to form a smooth, practically waterproof utensil.

In pre-Columbian times the Seris commonly sought wild game, mostly deer, without the aid of weapons, using only their tremendous physical endurance against their prey, chasing the animal until it was exhausted and could be thrown to the ground. With the introduction of iron, however, the development of the bow and arrow achieved prominence, for the shaping and fastening of points had long retarded the exploitation of these implements. Few straight stemmed or straight grained plants grow in Seriland suitable for making arrow shafts, but on the flanks of the deeper gorges of Sierra Seri and Sierra Kunkaak on Tiburon Island, the Indians found one leafy shrub that filled the need, *Sapium biloculare*. The juice of this plant is also said to have been used for arrow poison. The bow was preferably of palo blanco, wrapped and strung with mesquite fiber cord.

The modern Seri tribe consists of barely more than 100 souls, with early extinction threatening from imported diseases. Their natural habits are now vastly modified and they live a comparatively sedentary life near the village of Kino, scavengering for fish heads and other refuse discarded by the fishermen, now and then fishing for themselves when in need. Every year, however, they trek off to the cactus forest for the annual feast, and in late summer many may be seen camping among the mesquite groves near the Kino well where an abundance of both mesquite beans and water makes for easy living.

SERI BANDS

EDWARD MOSER

114

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ABSTRACT

105 621 642 614 [178] In previous publications on the Seri, frequent reference to distinct Seri groups points to historical tribal divisions at some level. Recent research among the Seri has determined the former existence of six bands which included three dialect groups. Three of the bands were subdivided into clans. These six bands, whose formation may have been caused largely by internal struggles, were eventually crushed and reduced to a single group by the devastation brought about by external conflict.

INTRODUCTION

10 13 [161] 178 62 642 121 621 642 The Seri tribe is located in Mexico along the coast of Sonora between Bahia Kino and Puerto Libertad, and on Tiburon Island (Fig. 1). Today it consists of approximately two hundred and eighty persons who call themselves *kongkaak*[1] "the people." Although at one time it was comprised of six distinct bands (Fig. 2), the tribe has now lost its band organization. However, much of the late history of these now-defunct tribal units remains vivid in the minds of the Seri. The purpose of this paper is to present some of the salient features of these former bands, to discuss certain interrelations between them, and to recount the Seri version of the disintegration of the band system.[2]

114 Three published studies on the Seri should be mentioned.[3] Of these, the reports by Kroeber and by Griffen are the more reliable. All three investigators mention tribal divisions which Griffen rightly designates as bands.

BANDS

642 101 131 BAND I *xika ?ai kkoii* "they who live toward the true wind"

This group is commonly referred to in the literature as the Tepoca or Salinero. As shown on Fig. 1, they inhabited an area which extended from a point slightly north of Puerto Lobos to Punta Tepopa on the south. The territory extended inland, encompassing the general area delimited by the San Ignacio River.

3: Lothrop E-5 (1924-1925) 1928
SH6 Yahgan SH6
Seri NU31

have made themselves as comfortable as other tribes occupying an equivalent environment. That they did not, to the writer, indicates a lack of something vital in their mental makeup.

The brief comparison we have made between primitive European and Fuegian cultures shows that although the Fuegians had partly attained the technological plane called Neolithic in the Old World, nevertheless in most respects they were scarcely better off than the semi-simian Neanderthal man of Europe. Clearly then they were laggards or backsliders in the development of mankind, so that in depicting their manner of life we are justified in assuming that we are recreating a vista of life in Europe or elsewhere many thousands of years ago.

However, the tribes of Tierra del Fuego are not a unique phenomenon, as we shall show by comparison with an equally though differently untutored New World group.

B.—Fuegians Compared with the Seri

The Seri, who inhabit a barren territory on the eastern shore of the Gulf of California and the adjacent islands, of which the largest is Tiburon, are one of the most primitive Indian tribes on the North American continent. Their climate is hot and dry. Their food supply is abundant—both marine and terrestrial. Like Fuegia the region occupied by the Seri is isolated from the main stream of cultural development, so that the native society probably represents a form of life much more wide-spread long ago.

Like the Fuegians, the Seri had no agriculture and no domestic animals except the dog, which indeed seems to have been half-wild. Their most important food was the turtle, which they caught with a harpoon having a detachable head tied to a cord. This may be compared to the Yahgan seal-spear. Long ago they used a two-headed barbed spear with the barbs facing inward to catch fish. The Yahgan also employed a two-headed fish-spear, but did not set the barbs inward. For boats the Seri made reed balsas with high pointed ends, a seaworthy craft but one which can be used only in warm climates because in rough weather the crew are drenched with spray or wet by water coming through the floor. These balsas the Seri propelled with clam-shells or boards held in the hands. In addition to spearing fish off-shore the Seri also caught them with their hands in shallow pools at low tide like the Ona, and they obtained on the beach large quantities of shellfish—chiefly clams and oysters.

3: Lothrop E-5 (1924-1925) 1928
SH6 Yahgan SH6
Seri NW31

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On shore the Seri gathered various wild vegetal foods. They clubbed roosting pelicans at night. They caught also many deer and rabbits. We use the word caught advisedly, for usually the Seri, fleet of foot and hardy, ran these animals down and literally caught them in their hands. Meat was eaten raw except when there was an oversupply. Then it was partly cooked to tempt their jaded appetites. At times in hunting and regularly in war they employed a bow and arrows of simple type. The arrow had a wooden tip, rarely a chipped stone point.

For tools the Seri used a bone or a wooden awl, a wooden marline spike, a stone hammer and anvil, and a clam-shell. The latter served as a knife, but its shape was not modified, nor was it set in a handle. Manual dexterity was at a minimum among these people, and their implements and weapons were even more primitive than those of the Fuegians.

The fundamental Seri garment was a pelican-skin robe, which, like the Yahgan cape, was shifted from side to side with the wind in inclement weather. Also they wore at times a kilt and sleeved shirt of woven material, and thus they placed themselves on a higher cultural plane than the Fuegians, for they not only had acquired the art of weaving, but of tailoring their garments, neither of which were known to the Indians of Tierra del Fuego. In addition, the Seri wore a belt, often of snake-skin, and sometimes sandals of turtle-flippers. They adorned their persons with necklaces of seeds, of wooden beads, of shell, and of hair. They painted designs on the faces much more elaborate in character than those of the Ona and Yahgan.

Seri houses, scarcely better than the Ona windbreak, were arches of saplings partly shingled with sponges and turtle-shells. Inadequate even in a warm climate, yet they offered more protection comparatively than the Fuegian houses. As the Seri were constantly moving from place to place, these rude shelters were frequently abandoned to be reoccupied on some other occasion.

Of household furniture the chief article was a globular pottery water-jar, because water was scarce in Seriland and had to be transported long distances. A yucca ring-base was provided for the water-jar, and at times two jars were transported in nets slung on a shoulder yoke. In addition the Seri sometimes made a cooking-pot, an open dish, miniature vessels, and crude figurines; they also used a shell cup, and made simple coiled baskets. Their

3: Lothrop E-5 (1924-1925) 1928
SH6 Yahgan SH6
Seri NU31

babies they carried on wooden frames like the Ona. Fire they made with a drill.

From the above remarks it appears that other inhabitants of the New World lived on a technological plane different in detail but no higher than the natives of Tierra del Fuego. Indeed in many respects—notably the lack of a knife and a scraper—the Seri are the more primitive. Yet their need was not so great, because the climate they enjoyed did not make such demands on their vitality.

When we examine social institutions we find the Seri on a markedly higher plane than the Fuegians. The tribe as a whole had marked national consciousness. It was divided into exogamic totemic clans based on maternal descent. Authority was lodged in the matrons, delegated to the elder brother for such masculine occupations as war and hunting. Religious concepts and practices also were on a higher plane than in Tierra del Fuego.

On the whole then we may say that the Seri, like the Fuegians, were a marginal group representing an early cultural stream; that both peoples were markedly deficient in houses, tools, and accouterments; but that the Seri, being closer to the fringe of higher culture, had borrowed in rudimentary form such higher arts as pottery-making and weaving, and had become endowed with more advanced religious and social practices. In both cases it seems that, although migratory by nature, their peregrinations had been circumscribed within fixed limits with resultant cultural atrophy, so that centuries had passed with little modification in their form of life.

The status of very primitive groups like the Fuegians and the Seri has bearing on the unknown pioneers who settled the New World, for the simplest and crudest tribes of the present may reflect the condition of their primitive migratory ancestors. We shall examine then the evidence afforded by such backward groups to throw light on the time when the Americas were settled and on the nature of the culture that was first introduced.

Boas,[1] Wissler,[2] Kroeber,[3] and others have brought forward evidence that man reached the New World in a state of cultural development corresponding to the beginning of the Neolithic period in Europe. This hypothesis rests on fairly well assured

[1] The History of the American Race; *Annals N. Y. Acad. of Science*, XXI, 1912.
[2] The American Indian, New York, 1917.
[3] American Culture and the Northwest Coast; *Amer. Anthr.*, N.S., XXV, no. 1. Also Anthropology, New York, 1923.